

One Grand Loop Across China

Introduction Copy

Pele Leung

One Grand Loop Across China

Author: Pele Leung

Publisher: Pele Leung Photography

Website: www.peleleung.com

Email: pelel@peleleung.com

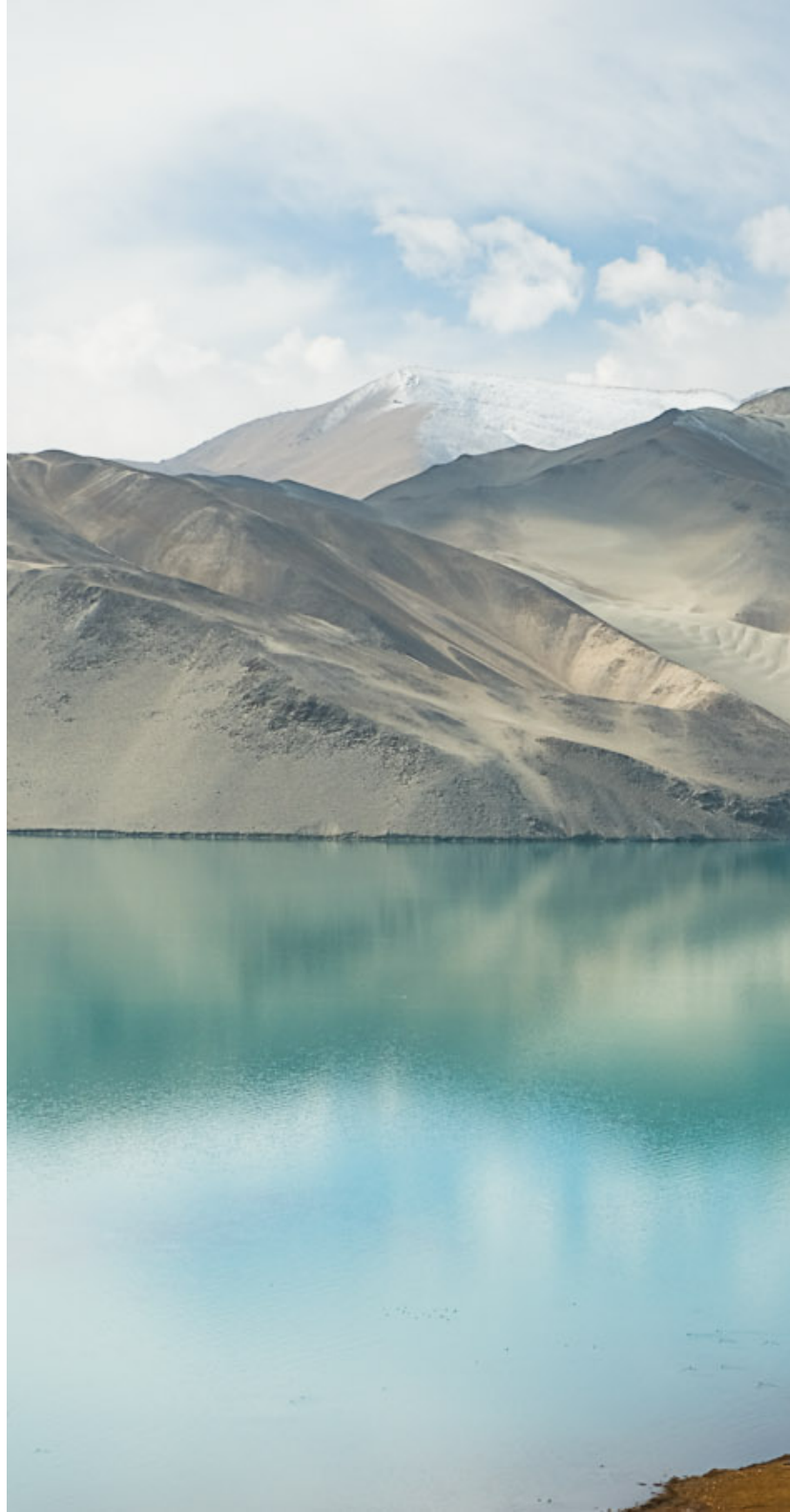
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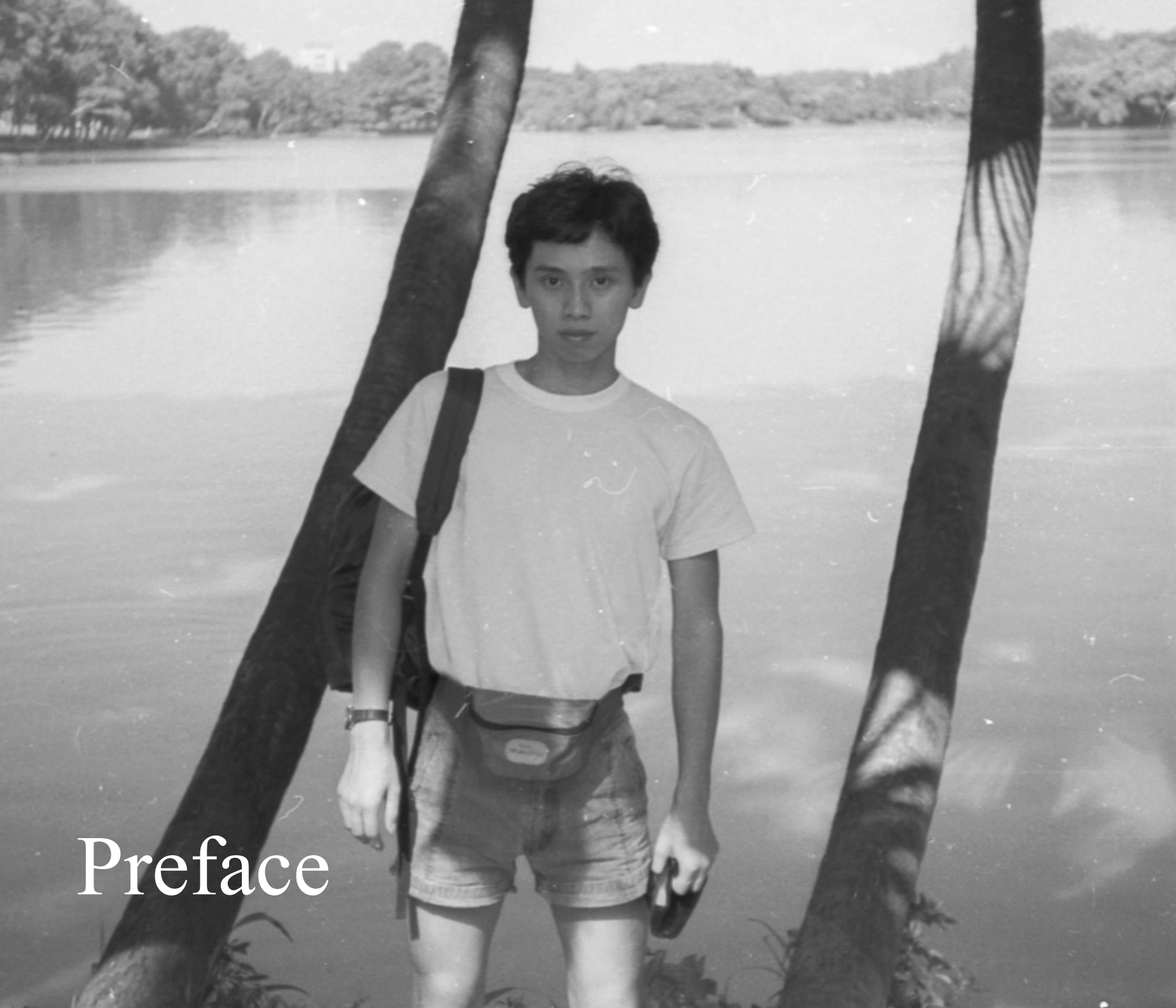
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Preface

In the early 1970s, my father received a letter from our relative in China, roughly to the effect that Granny had just passed away and that we should return to our hometown as soon as possible. In those days of poor communication, our household did not even have a telephone, let alone a mobile phone; and postal delivery was rather slow. By the time we got back to our ancestral home, Granny had long since been laid to rest. As I was the youngest, my parents did not feel easy about leaving me home alone, so they took me along with them.

The green train pulled out of the terminus at Tsim Sha Tsui in Hong Kong, made its way through the New Territories' farmland, and after more than two hours arrived at Lo Wu. After crossing the border, we transferred to a train bound for Guangzhou. At that time, Shenzhen was still rural, with paddy fields on either side of the railway tracks. As a child, I had little feeling for the scenery, so my recollection is hazy. That was my first time setting foot on the mainland China.

During my student days in Britain, I came back to Hong Kong for the summer holidays one year and, together with two ex-classmates, took a week's trip to Guangdong and Hunan provinces. That was my first proper journey to China. At that time, the mainland was still in the early stages of reform and opening-up; the renminbi was not yet an international currency. In order to boost foreign exchange earnings, Foreign Exchange Certificates (FECs for short) were introduced to make it easier for overseas visitors to spend money on the mainland. Since goods were generally in short supply and luxury items especially hard to come by, suppliers would only accept FECs, which made them highly sought after. Over time, after more than a decade of economic reform – about fifteen years in total – the FEC was withdrawn from circulation in 1995, having fulfilled its historical mission.

Back then, entry into the mainland required a maroon-coloured Home Return Permit for Hong Kong and Macau compatriots – rather like a special passport, and the forerunner of today's Mainland Travel Permit for Hong Kong and Macau Residents (commonly known as the "Home Return Card"). That permit had 48 pages: the first few were for personal identification, while the rest were used for each entry and exit. Each page was divided into four sections; the upper smaller portion was for entry and exit stamps, and the remaining two sections were for customs declarations and miscellaneous notes. Every time one entered the mainland, one had to declare personal valuables – watches, rings, cash and so on – on the permit, to prevent their being resold illegally. In today's age of digital information, it is hard to imagine all that red tape!

Since I was still a student at the time, photographic film was not cheap for me, so I did not take many pictures on that trip – they were purely for record-keeping, and nothing like great photographic works. That journey was deeply memorable; even today, many years later, certain scenes and details from that time still linger in my mind and refuse to fade.

How time flies! The little moments from my school days can now only be recalled through old photo albums. As the years passed, I eventually made my way to Australia to develop my career. It was not until the winter of 2009 that my China photography dream truly began. In December that year, my family and I travelled to Jiuzhaigou and Mount Emei in Sichuan. The scenery along the way was breathtaking – so different from the Australian landscape – and, combined with my sentimental attachment to the history and culture of the motherland, the grand plan to photograph China finally took shape.

From that reunion with the motherland onwards – apart from those two or three years during the pandemic – I have basically returned to China every year to take photographs. In the early years, I mostly joined group tours; later I occasionally tried independent travel, but only on short routes. It was not until the recent explosive development of tourist facilities, transport and digital payment systems on the mainland that I began to travel mostly on my own. Nowadays, with just a mobile phone and a few registered apps, almost all travel needs – accommodation, transport, tickets, dining, and even booking local tours online – can be effortlessly sorted out.

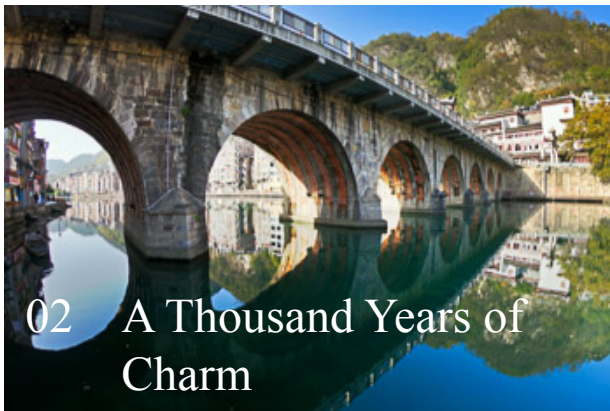
In November 2025, I finally fulfilled my aspiration of "travelling all round China". Even though it was only a whirlwind tour – visiting every province, autonomous region and municipality – it still counted as a milestone in my travels across China.

After completing the first volume of my photographic travel e-book on China in 2016, and over the ten years since, this is now the third – and final – volume. These three e-books record what I saw and heard along the way. For me, they are a labour of love, and also a precious gift for anyone who might be interested. My journey of photographing China will not stop here; I simply plan to document it in a different way. For now, I do not have a concrete plan, but perhaps I will spring a surprise on everyone before too long.

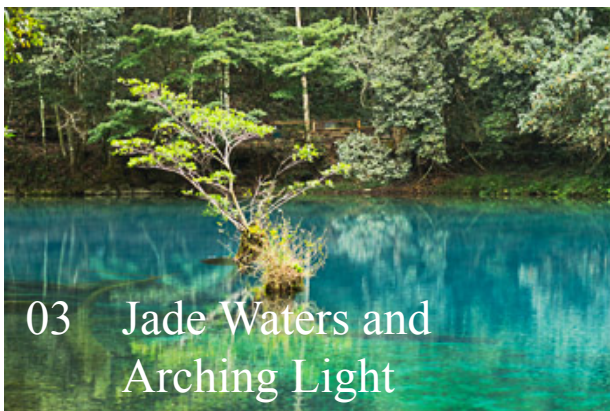
By the time you read what I have written today, this e-book should already be out. Aside from hoping that you will enjoy it, I would also like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for your support. If fate should ever bring us together on the road, do say hello and shake my hand.



After visiting Guiyang's Jiaxiu Tower, the illuminated "White Palace", and the Guizhou Ethnic Museum, we headed straight for Fanjing Mountain. The cable car rose through clouds, but Red Cloud Golden Summit remained hidden in thick fog. Mushroom Rock resembled a stack of ancient books. Visibility was poor on the mountain but the fog dissipated as we descended.



Zhenyuan's Wuyang River shimmered jade-green; night cruises revealed lantern-lit banks, while dawn and dusk cast ever-changing hues. Stone bridges framed perfect views. At Xijiang's Thousand-Household Miao Village, I met a photographer from Dunhuang. Such chance encounters often become travel's most treasured moments.



Libo's scenic Seven-Arch Bridge spans emerald waters. Water forests have roots gripping rocks; Cuigu Waterfall cascades down verdant cliffs; Wolong Pool glows like polished jade. The karst wonders left lasting memories, and the unexpected incidents along the way only made the journey more memorable.

Heading north from Zunyi to Chishui, I explored hidden landscapes: Chishui's great waterfall, Yanziping cliff path, Red Stone Valley, and Fuguang Rock's Lotus Terrace. The red Danxia sandstone contrasted beautifully with western Guizhou's terrain. Local warmth and a string of stories added depth to this rugged corner of the province.

Zhijin Cave, hailed as "China's finest karst cave", features vast chambers and myriad stalactite forms. A small boat carried me through the Grand Canyon's water tunnel, where light gave way to darkness like passing through a gateway to another world. A thundering waterfall and natural bridge completed this underground adventure.

First came Doupotang's low rumble, then Tianxingqiao's winding paths, and finally the exquisite Silver Chain Waterfall. Huangguoshu itself lived up to its fame—thundering waters, a rainbow arcing through the spray, and an unforgettable roar that marked a satisfying conclusion to the Guizhou journey.





07 Walkabout on
Mountains

I had planned a folding-bike ride from Xiqiao to Zhaoqing, but my pack was too heavy. Instead, I took short rides around Xiqiao, one of Guangdong's four famous mountains. I visited the Square Bamboo Garden, Jiguan Peak, and the towering 60-metre Guanyin statue—just enough to say I had been there.



08 Homeward Bound to
Native Soil

Since I was already at Xiqiao, I decided to visit my ancestral village. At first I didn't recognise it, but by chance I met my sister-in-law, who led me to three elder cousins I hadn't seen in fifty years. We shared childhood memories, grey-haired now—and my hometown no longer felt distant.



09 Leisurely Strolls by
Lake and Hill

Arriving in Zhaoqing by high-speed rail, I spent three days cycling. The path around Star Lake hugged the water and cut through shady groves. Simple Cantonese meals at a local noodle shop suited me perfectly. I never entered the famous caves, but the ride itself felt poetic.

I stayed in a small room at Xingping and strolled along the Li River. Next day, cycling into the hills nearly lost me my backpack. In Yangshuo on Christmas Boxing Day, a street singer performed Cantonese songs. Hearing my mother tongue so far from home—and the rice noodles, bamboo rice, and river sunsets—stayed with me.

A video online inspired me to cycle Zengcheng's riverside greenway. The red path followed the jade-green Zeng River, through woodlands and wetland. Bald Cypress were just turning orange, and their reflections on still lakes, with egrets passing by, felt like stepping into a Lingnan scroll.

Arriving in Guangzhou from Zengcheng, rain began. I got lost, then found a hidden apartment atop a hotel. After the rain, I climbed Guangzhou Tower—fog blurred the city like a winter view. At night, a spectacular light show unfolded. The next morning, sunshine returned, and my cycling journey ended.



10 Pure Sounds of Hills and Streams



11 A Poetic Path Beneath My Wheels



12 Misty Rain and City Lights



13 Top of the World

Severe altitude sickness struck on arrival—headache and vomiting. I joined a tour to Linzhi, the Yarlung Tsangpo Gorge, and Yamdrok Lake. Climbing the hillside by Namtso Lake alone gave me the most unforgettable moment. Returning to Xining on the Qinghai-Tibet sleeper train, nine days without a shower became a personal record.



14 Emerald Drops
Scattered on Earth

Meeting my sisters in Xining, we began the Qinghai-Gansu loop. Chaka Salt Lake, the "Sky Mirror", was hit by a once-in-a-decade storm—hotels flooded. Among the salt lakes we visited, Dachaidan's Emerald Lake stood out with its vivid colours, becoming my favourite of the entire trip.



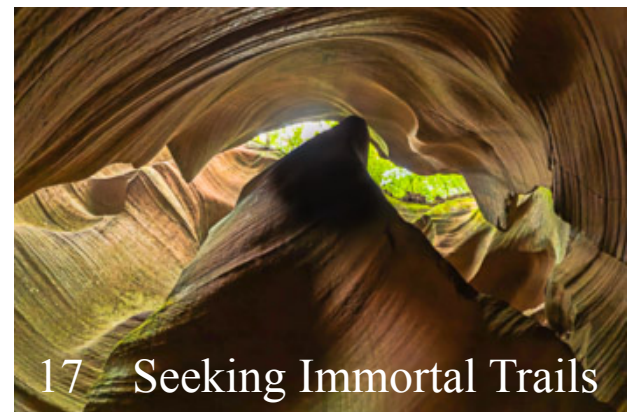
15 Wandering the Ancient
Silk Road

At Yangguan, only a solitary stone pier remained. Mogao Caves drew long queues; the 26-metre Buddha in Cave 130 rivalled Longmen's. We crossed Singing Sand Dunes, Jiayuguan Pass, Zhangye's Danxia rainbow hills, and Yellow River Stone Forest. Finally, Lanzhou's Bronze Galloping Horse and Maijishan Grottoes closed our Silk Road.

Arriving at dusk, I walked Xi'an's ancient city wall by lantern light—touching bricks a thousand years old. The next day, I hired a bike and pedalled 13 kilometres under the blazing sun, pausing for a photo with German tourists. Afternoon brought the Tang Paradise show, and the Han-Tang spirit lingered.



I explored Crescent Valley and Birch Valley in Ganquan. The first widened then narrowed to a slit of sky; the second was deep and steep, with wave-like pothole textures on the cliffs. An overcast sky subdued the famous colours, but revealed the canyon's raw mystery—a place for those who listen closely.



On my return, I stopped in Wuhan to trace history—seeking the Sword of Goujian and Marquis Yi's bells. Mid-autumn festival found me walking the Yangtze, watching the illuminated Yellow Crane Tower. In Changsha, I saw the 49-gram silk gown, so light it seemed woven from mist—unforgettable.





19 The Maple King Still Slumbers On

In 2025, I visited Liaoning for the first time, hoping for autumn colours. But the timing was off—the maple leaves had not yet turned. Despite the disappointment, I walked for five hours, covering nearly fifteen kilometres, and found satisfaction in the effort and the quiet beauty of the mountain.



20 Old Palace Tales

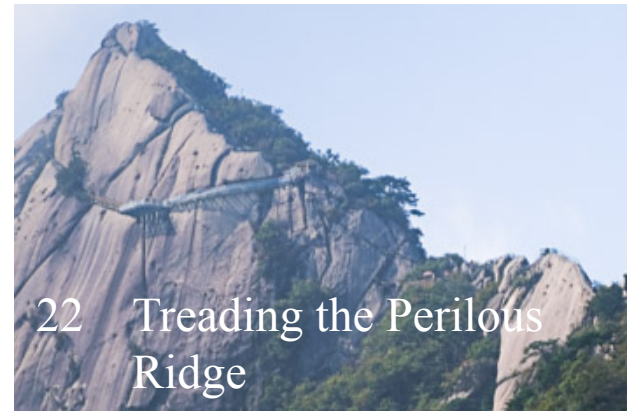
At Liaoning Provincial Museum, I hoped to see the Court Ladies Adorning Their Hair scroll, but it was not on display. I did see the Jade Pig-Dragon, glass duck-shaped vessel, and bronze treasures. Shenyang's Forbidden Palace, simpler than Beijing's, offered a glimpse of early Qing life and imperial rise and fall.



21 National Wounds We Must Not Forget

My taxi driver admitted he had never visited the 9.18 Historical Museum—too painful. The outdoor stele fixes that date in memory, and the bronze bell bears the inscription "Never Forget the National Shame". Inside, exhibits of Japanese occupation, forced education, economic plunder, and Unit 731's horrors left a deep impact.

After a hearty breakfast, I tackled Phoenix Mountain's "Old Bull's Back"—a narrow ridge barely one person wide, with sheer drops and railings only knee-high. Two-yuan gloves helped me grip the chains. I passed safely. Later, I heard a tourist had fallen there last month—I shuddered.



22 Treading the Perilous Ridge

By midday I reached Dandong. Rehearsals for an evening square gala drew my camera. Afternoon brought the Yalu River Broken Bridge—rusted steel beams, Korean War memories. I left early to catch a train, but the bridge's silent witness and the evening songs stayed with me.

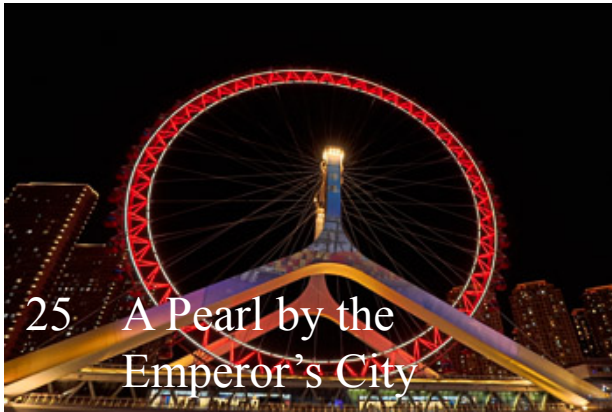


23 Broken Bridge Gazing to the Far Shore

The Red Beach is actually a wetland of suaeda grass that turns scarlet in autumn, stretching for miles beside golden rice fields. Boardwalks lead into the reeds, but the best view came from above—the "Tree of Life" water pattern revealed at low tide.



24 Red Shores Stretching to the Sky



25 A Pearl by the
Emperor's City

A night cruise on the Haihe River showcased the Ferris Wheel and brilliant light shows. Next day, Tianjin Museum—excellent. I also caught a copper art exhibition, and the Porcelain House, a building encrusted with broken ceramics, was breathtaking. Three fleeting nights left vivid memories.



26 A Thousand Miles
Begin with One Step

Sixteen years on, I returned to Xinjiang. After flying to Ürümqi, my sisters and I took a slow train ride to Korla. The carriage was packed, but a kind attendant reorganised our luggage rack. Our driver Xiao Luo would soon take us 500 kilometres to Kuqa Grand Canyon—adventure ahead.



27 Deep Gorges with
Towering Cliffs

Kuqa Grand Canyon, also known as the Tianshan Mysterious Grand Canyon, its red sandstone walls shifted between wide passages and crevices so narrow one could only sidle through. I caught a photograph of a couple on camels—a fleeting encounter, captured by chance, before we all went our separate ways.

Kuqa's "Men Bazaar" revived ancient crafts—poplar woodcarving, weaving, and blacksmithing. We pushed on to Kashgar, then three days on the Pamir Plateau without altitude sickness. I enjoyed Xinjiang cuisine, visited Fragrant Concubine's Garden, climbed Kunlun Tower, and explored old city lanes.



28 Vast Western Scenes of Ancient Days

We hiked the Muztagh Glacier, a one-kilometre boardwalk to the top. The Panlong Ancient Road featured over 600 bends through snow-capped mountains. On the way back, Baisha Lake's jade-green reflections stole the show—winding roads and stunning views, hoping life's path would become smoother from now on.



29 Footprints Left on Lofty Heights

From Jiuquan, we drove to Ejina Poplar Forest in Inner Mongolia. The golden Jinta poplars dazzled, but Ejina itself was overcrowded. After three days of poplar-gazing, we suffered from beauty fatigue—yet the trees' thousand-year resilience left a lasting mark on my heart.



30 Solitary Trees Stand a Thousand Years



31 Waves on Dunes

Our driver took us deep into the Badain Jaran in a 4x4. Sand dunes rose like waves; lakes dotted the desert, with Dalgut's lake glowing pink. We stayed overnight—a fierce storm knocked out power. The next morning, a chance chat with a Western restaurant owner brightened our exit.



32 Seeking Ancient Traces Beyond the Wall

From Yinchuan, we visited Qingtongxia's Yellow River canyon, the 108 pagodas, and the Ningxia Museum's Western Xia relics. The imperial tombs were bare—emptied by Mongol armies long ago. Then I moved on to Chengdu, leaving the "South of the Great Wall" behind.



33 Wondrous Treasures of the Past

Sanxingdui Museum, near Guanghan, displays bronze artefacts so strange they seem extraterrestrial. The four-metre bronze tree with nine birds echoes the "ten suns" myth; the towering figure with hollow hands remains a mystery. This site proves that the Yangtze once nurtured a civilisation to rival the Central Plains.

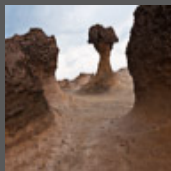
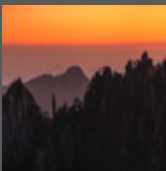
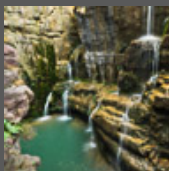
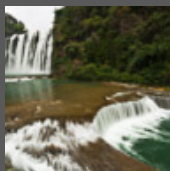
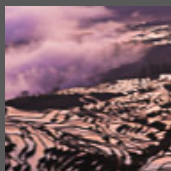
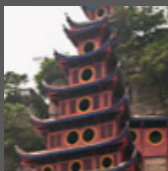
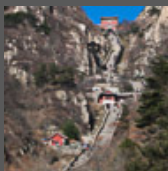
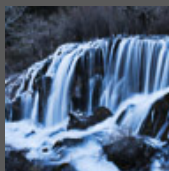
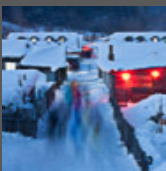
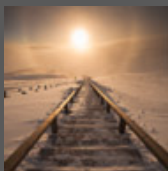
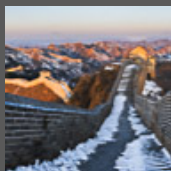
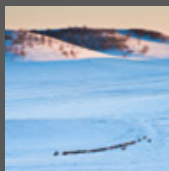
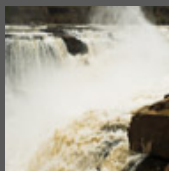
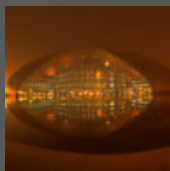
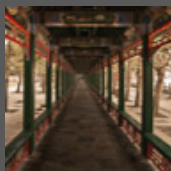
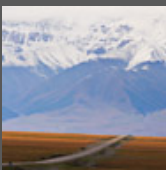
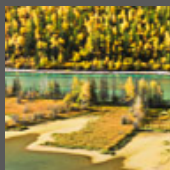
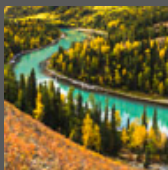
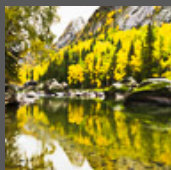
Arriving from Yinchuan, I spent four days in Chengdu—Chunxi Road, Anshun Bridge, and the Sichuan Museum. I also visited the "Matchmaking Corner" and the century-old He Ming Teahouse in People's Park, experiencing the city's laid-back "bashi" rhythm—ancient civilisation and modern life intertwined.

To complete my "Grand Loop Across China", I flew to Hainan with my folding bike. I cycled through Coconut Groves, the Shenzhou Peninsula, and Sanya, then back to Haikou. No grand sights—just everyday island life. Sixteen years of travel across China, and the final piece clicked into place on two wheels.





Revisiting Previous Journeys



I have journeyed through every province, autonomous region, and municipality, and have also set foot in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan.



One Grand Loop Across.....

China

西北

新疆

- 01 烏魯木齊
- 02 石河子
- 03 賽里木湖
- 04 烏爾禾魔鬼城
- 05 喀納斯
- 06 白哈巴
- 07 禾木
- 08 白沙湖
- 09 可可托海
- 10 五彩灣
- 11 火燒山
- 12 庫爾勒
- 13 庫車
- 14 天山大峽谷
- 15 喀什
- 16 帕米爾高原

青海

- 17 西寧
- 18 茶卡鹽湖
- 19 察爾汗鹽湖
- 20 水上雅丹
- 21 大柴旦翡翠湖

甘肅

- 22 蘭州
- 23 酒泉
- 24 陽關
- 25 敦煌莫高窟
- 26 張掖七彩丹霞
- 27 黃河石林
- 28 麥積山

陝西

- 29 西安
- 30 兵馬俑
- 31 華山
- 32 甘泉大峽谷

寧夏

- 33 銀川
- 34 青銅峽

華北

北京

- 01 北京市

天津

- 02 天津市

山西

- 03 太原
- 04 平遙古城
- 05 壺口瀑布
- 06 喬家大院

河北

- 07 壩上
- 08 承德避暑山莊
- 09 金山嶺長城

內蒙古

- 10 額濟納旗
- 11 巴丹吉林沙漠

東北

吉林

- 01 長春
- 02 長白山
- 03 向海

黑龍江

- 04 雪鄉

遼寧

- 05 瀋陽
- 06 關門山
- 07 鳳凰山
- 08 丹東
- 09 盤錦

西南

西藏

- 01 拉薩
- 02 山南
- 03 林芝
- 04 羊卓雍錯
- 05 卡若拉冰川
- 06 日喀則
- 07 納木錯

四川

- 08 成都
- 09 九寨溝
- 10 峨眉山
- 11 上里古鎮
- 12 瀘定
- 13 木格措
- 14 伍須海
- 15 稻城亞丁
- 16 紅草灘

重慶

- 17 重慶市
- 18 石寶寨
- 19 白帝城

雲南

- 20 昆明
- 21 城子村
- 22 羅平
- 23 九龍瀑布
- 24 元陽
- 25 建水

廣西

- 26 桂林 / 陽朔 / 興坪古鎮 / 葡萄鎮石頭城
- 27 黃姚古鎮
- 28 賀州紫雲洞 / 姑婆山 / 玉石林

貴州

- 29 貴陽
- 30 馬嶺河峽谷 / 興義萬峰林
- 31 黃果樹瀑布 / 安順龍宮
- 32 天龍屯堡
- 33 青岩古鎮
- 34 梵淨山
- 35 鎮遠古鎮
- 36 西江千戶苗寨
- 37 大小七孔
- 38 赤水
- 39 織金洞 / 織金大峽谷

華中

河南

- 01 鄭州
- 02 龍門石窟
- 03 嵩山少林寺
- 04 雲台山

湖北

- 05 武漢
- 06 荊州古城
- 07 長江三峽
- 08 恩施土司城 / 恩施大峽谷 / 石門河
- 09 武當山
- 10 神農架

湖南

- 11 長沙 / 嶽麓山
- 12 鳳凰古城
- 13 張家界
- 14 莽山
- 15 衡山

華東

山東

- 01 濟南
- 02 泰山
- 03 曲阜孔廟

江蘇

- 04 南京
- 05 蘇州
- 06 周莊

上海

- 07 上海市

浙江

- 08 杭州 / 西湖
- 09 西塘古鎮 / 烏鎮

安徽

- 10 黃山 / 宏村

江西

- 11 南昌
- 12 龍虎山
- 13 三青山 / 婺源
- 14 景德鎮

華南

廣東

- 01 廣州
- 02 韶關 / 丹霞山
- 03 西樵山 / 鼎湖山
- 04 肇慶

福建

- 05 廈門 / 古浪嶼
- 06 福建土樓

海南

- 07 海口
- 08 文昌 / 東郊椰林
- 09 神州半島
- 10 三亞

香港

澳門

台灣

- 01 台北
- 02 基隆 / 野柳 / 老梅石槽 / 十分瀑布
- 03 烏來
- 04 太魯閣 / 清水斷崖
- 05 台中 / 日月潭
- 06 高雄
- 07 墾丁

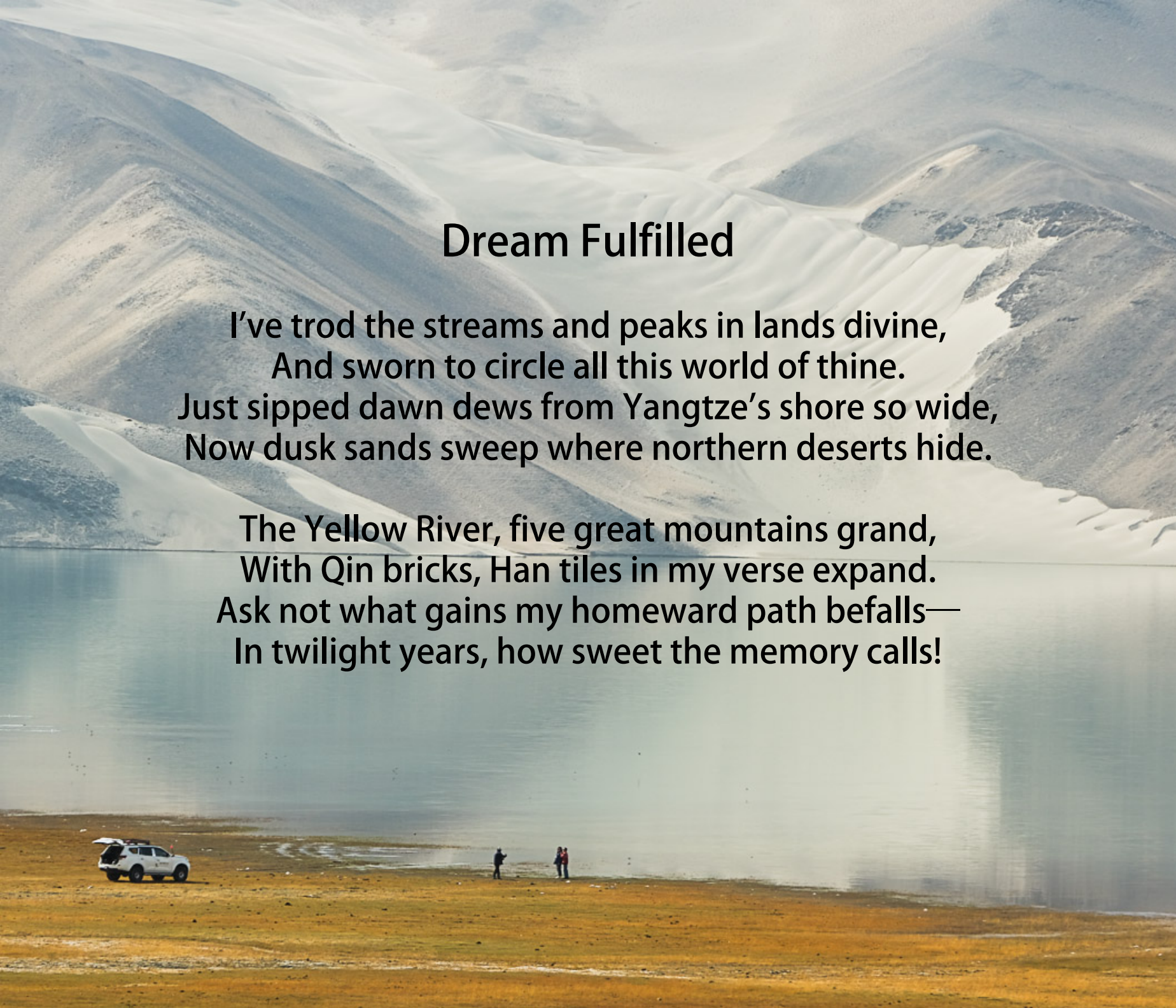
About the Author

Pele Leung worked in the software industry for many years before falling in love with landscape photography over two decades ago. A fortunate turn of events later led him to spend the better part of a year travelling across the entire continent of Australia, capturing countless photographs along the way. After that journey came to an end, he decided to pursue a professional career in photography.

Besides photographing Australia, he also travels frequently to China – a practice he has maintained almost every year since 2009. His subjects are not limited to natural landscapes, but also encompass local architecture, cultural relics, and the human stories woven into the scenery. Pele now lives in Melbourne, Australia.







Dream Fulfilled

I've trod the streams and peaks in lands divine,
And sworn to circle all this world of thine.
Just sipped dawn dew from Yangtze's shore so wide,
Now dusk sands sweep where northern deserts hide.

The Yellow River, five great mountains grand,
With Qin bricks, Han tiles in my verse expand.
Ask not what gains my homeward path befalls—
In twilight years, how sweet the memory calls!